



startups
for society

NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT IMPACT STARTUPS ECOSYSTEM

INTRODUCTION



This report presents a needs analysis of impact startups within the Startups for Society ecosystem. Its primary objective is to identify actionable insights that can enhance ecosystem support, with particular focus on the four work packages of the Startups for Society collaboration (Knowledge, Events, Communication and Finance), with findings for the fifth work package (Ecosystem) arising from the interviews.

Executive summary

This needs analysis shows that the strongest demand is for a combination of ecosystem access, practical knowledge, relevant events, targeted communication and finance guidance.

The clearest patterns are:

- A key finding is the importance of the business developers in the ecosystem. They are highly appreciated by the startups with a rating of 4/5. The business developers are the linking pin between the support offered by the partners of Startups for Society and the startups.
- Ecosystem connection is the dominant need. Connections needed are around 3 main groups; Entrepreneurs (peers and more experienced founders), experts and potential customers. Many startups are asking for access: access to municipalities, care organizations, insurers, B2B clients, researchers, investors, and relevant peer founders.
- Knowledge needs are highly practical. Startups mainly want applied support in marketing, legal/regulatory issues, funding scaling, and storytelling, rather than generic inspiration.
- Events are wanted, but only when highly relevant. Startups prefer themed, practical, or curated networking-oriented sessions over general events.
- Email is still the default communication channel. It is by far the most preferred channel, followed by phone including WhatsApp, and occasionally by LinkedIn.
- Finance support is a need. Startups are asking for subsidies, grants, investment access, and clearer procedures. Many founders specifically mention that grant and subsidy processes are time-consuming and difficult to navigate.
- A platform is not universally desired. Interest is split: some startups want a moderated platform or community hub, while others prefer direct human introductions over another digital space.

METHOD



The analysis is based on data collected through interviews and is structured around four key domains: knowledge, events, communication and finance. In total, 29 interviews were conducted with startups supported by the various Startups for Society partners. Of these, 27 interviews were included in the final analysis, as two recordings were not usable. Out of the 72 startups currently supported within the ecosystem, approximately 40% were interviewed. A total of 46 startups were identified as eligible for participation, of which 29 were successfully interviewed.

Partner	Startups interviewed
Midpoint Brabant	20 (1 not used)
Tilburg University	7 (1 not used)
Fontys	1
Avans	1

All interviews were transcribed and, where necessary, translated. The data was then coded according to predefined criteria aligned with the four work packages. Initially, AI was used to support the coding process. Subsequently, interviewers reviewed all the transcripts and AI-generated codes to validate the results and incorporate any missing information. This process was applied consistently across all interviews. Finally, the coded summaries were further refined and recategorized into specific knowledge areas corresponding to the work packages, forming the basis for this report.

WORK PACKAGE AREAS; KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge needs among startups are highly practical and strongly focused on execution.

Knowledge source

The majority of startups (13) primarily source the information they need online, with 7 explicitly mentioning the use of AI tools to support their searches. The second most common approach is leveraging personal and professional networks (8), followed by consulting experts on specific topics when required (4). Additional sources of knowledge include incubators, YouTube (3), workshops, fairs, books (2), as well as news, articles, newsletters, LinkedIn, and podcasts (each mentioned once).

Main knowledge sources currently used:

Internet: 13	Youtube: 3	Newsletters: 2
Network: 8	Incubator: 3	News Articles: 1
AI: 7	Workshops: 2	Instagram: 1
Experts: 4	Books: 2	Linkedin: 1
	Fairs: 2	Podcasts: 1

These findings indicate that startups do not rely on general or broad information sources. Instead, they engage in targeted and need-driven knowledge acquisition, using online tools, networks, and expert input to obtain specific, actionable insights relevant to their immediate challenges.

Knowledge Topics

The types of knowledge startups are seeking is primarily practical and application oriented. The first theme is marketing oriented knowledge with questions on branding, storytelling and social media use for customer acquisition and brand recognition.

The second theme is business administration knowledge, including tax regulations, legal structures, accounting systems, and cost-effective tools for tracking KPIs.

In addition, there is a strong demand for guidance on operations and technical aspects of their business, to help increase production.

Overall, startups place greater value on practical information related to setting up and running their business than on more conceptual topics such as impact entrepreneurship or impact measurement. Although startups that were involved in the Social Handprint pilot mentioned its value in supporting transparent storytelling and shaping future strategy.

Knowledge Topics Needed:

Marketing: Branding, Social Media, Storytelling: 7

Technical Assistance: 5

Sector specific - Issue Area: 5

Legal: 4

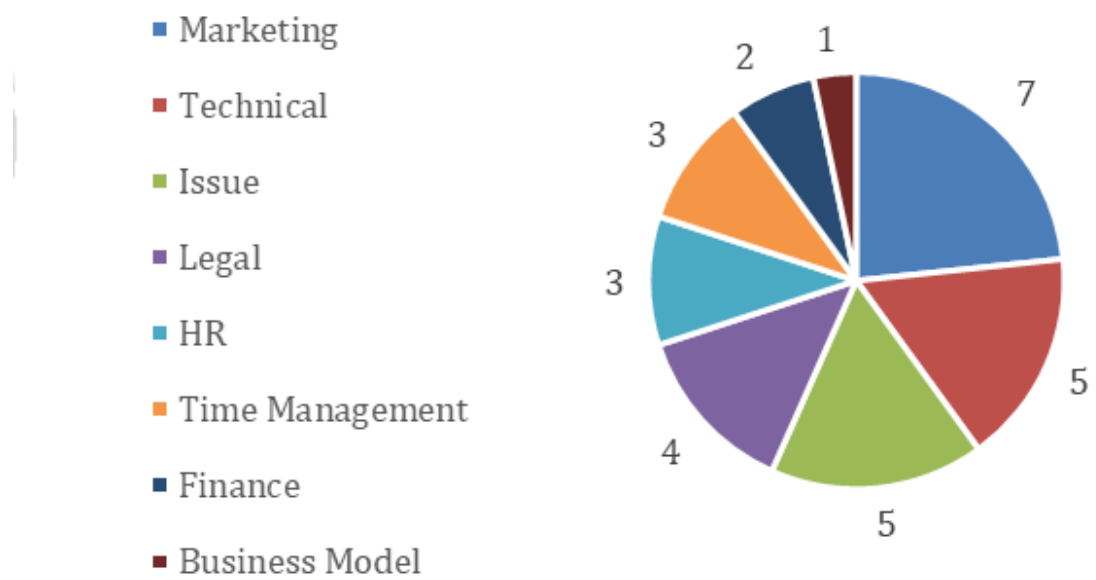
HR: Team management, Leadership: 3

Time management: 3

Business model: 3

Financial: Budgeting, Accounting: 2

Knowledge Topics Needed



Recommendations:

To support startups in developing their market identity, events focused on storytelling, branding, and positioning would be highly valuable.

For business administration needs, startups would benefit from access to specific, expert-driven advice. This could take the form of expert sessions or dedicated consultation moments (e.g. business developer and expert days, such as those organised at Interpolis), where founders can ask experts targeted questions. In addition, stronger linkages to existing offerings, such as Midpoint's (non-impact) business startup workshops, could further support these needs.

For sector-specific knowledge, thematic events focused on key domains, such as health, education, and social care, could be organised to provide more tailored and relevant insights, as well as to increase connections.

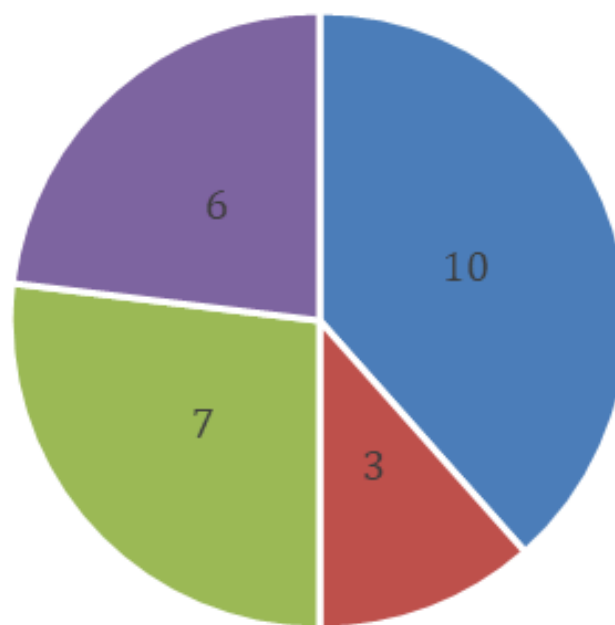
Reflection: Although knowledge related to impact does not appear to be a primary need for our startups, it remains important to continue promoting a strong focus on social impact. Without this, there is a risk of mission drift, where startups increasingly prioritise commercial objectives over their original social purpose. Sustained attention to impact can help ensure that startups maintain alignment with their core mission as social enterprises.

WORK PACKAGE AREAS; EVENTS

Startups value events that deliver clear, practical outcomes. Given their limited time, they need to feel that attending an event provides tangible value. The primary motivations for participation are opportunities to build relevant connections, particularly when events are focused on themes or challenges they are currently facing.

Many startups expressed a preference for more structured and interactive formats, such as dedicated networking or matchmaking sessions (e.g. speed dating), as well as opportunities to learn from peers and more experienced entrepreneurs.

Events Wanted



- Themes on issues or workshops/meeting experts)
- Co-founder/Investor
- Startups and different stages, mentor meetups, founder stories, peer to peer
- Networking: concrete connections

Recommendations:

To develop a coordinated and targeted event strategy that focuses on delivering clear, practical value aligned with startup needs. Events should prioritise:

- Targeted networking opportunities
- Matchmaking with investors and potential partners
- Themed, sector-specific and expert-led sessions
- Peer learning and founder storytelling
- Knowledge-driven workshops linked to core business challenges

Given that many relevant events already exist within the regional ecosystem, Startups for Society should adopt a hybrid role as both organiser and curator. This includes clearly distinguishing between:

- Events delivered by the partners of Startups for Society
- External ecosystem events to which startups are directed

A structured overview of both internal and external offerings should be made visible to startups, enabling easier navigation and reducing duplication of efforts. For example, strengthening connections to existing programmes, such as Midpoint’s business startup workshops.

In addition, linked to the knowledge needs of our startups more expert-driven formats should be introduced, such as dedicated consultation sessions or “expert days” (e.g. business developer and expert sessions as organised at Interpolis). The Connection is often mentioned as an example of an event where the value of the network can be directly applied.

A possible Founders Academy or other such initiative of a dedicated programme of workshops offered as a structured course for startups linked to impact and business knowledge.

WORK PACKAGE AREAS; COMMUNICATION

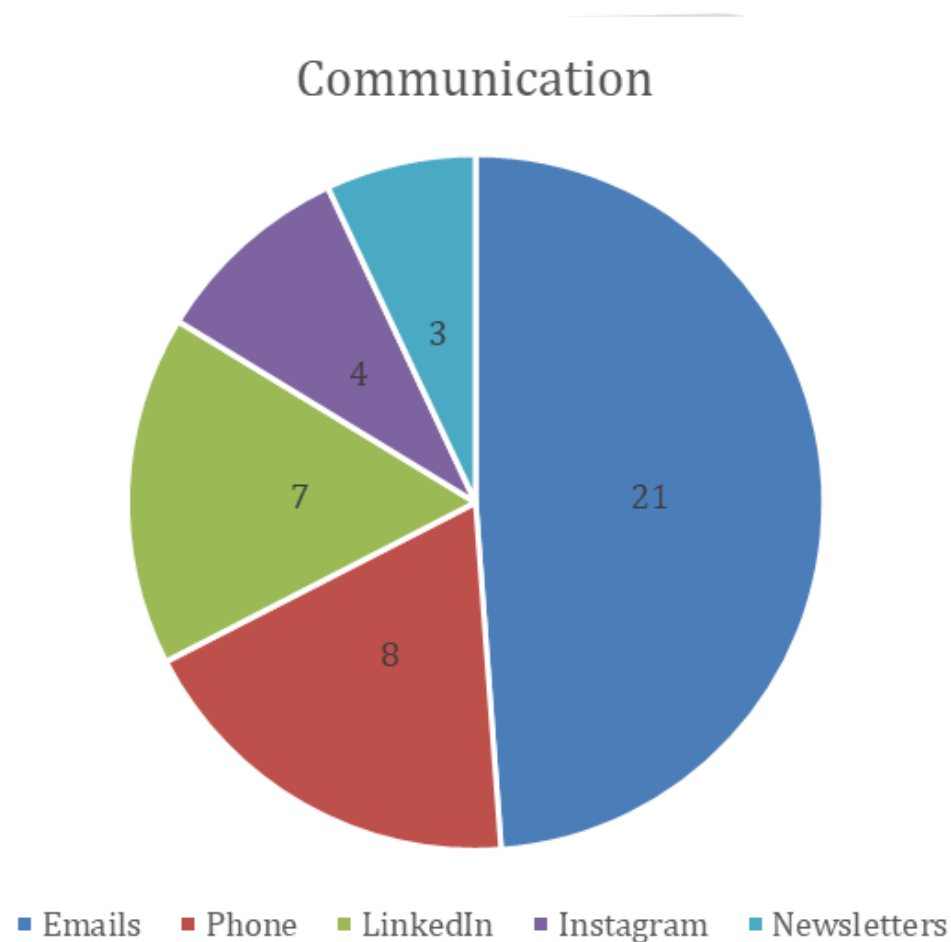
Startups show a strong preference for personalised communication, particularly through direct contact with their business developer. The most valued channels are email and telephone (including WhatsApp), which allow for tailored and relevant information exchange. In addition, startups are often connected to other entrepreneurial networks via WhatsApp.

While broader communication channels are used, they play a secondary role. Seven startups mentioned LinkedIn as a channel they engage with, and some also use Instagram. Newsletters are read, but typically at the startup's own convenience rather than as a primary source of timely information.

Startups emphasised that personalised communication about opportunities, such as events or programmes, delivered by business developers is most effective, as it ensures relevance to their specific needs and stage.

Preferred communication channels:

Email: 21 startups
Telephone / WhatsApp: 8
LinkedIn: 7
Instagram: 4
Newsletter: 3



In terms of content, startups expressed a clear preference for concrete and relatable communication about what the partners of Startups for Society offer. This includes:

- Profiles of support offered by partners of Startups for Society, examples of how startups have been supported.
- Profiles of supported startups, including what they do and how they have benefited from the ecosystem.

Such storytelling helps make the value of the ecosystem more visible, credible, and actionable for other startups.

Recommendations:

Create stories to share who and what Startups for Society is, stories showing the partners' services and the startups themselves.

Targeted communication from business developers is preferred, therefore ways to improve this and help the business developers share information is important.

WORK PACKAGE AREAS; FINANCE



Startups experience challenges in both accessing and navigating funding opportunities. A significant number of startups are currently self-funded and are not actively seeking external financing. Among those that are seeking funding, several indicated that they are already aware of relevant contacts within the ecosystem.

Startups who would like to scale are looking for further investment. However, the primary need identified is not necessarily access to investors, but rather clear and structured guidance on available subsidies and funding schemes. Startups specifically request comprehensive overviews of subsidies, including the criteria and requirements associated with each opportunity.

They require support in:

- Identifying which funding options are relevant to their stage and activities
- Assessing their eligibility
- Understanding application procedures
- Determining the appropriate timing for applications

Many founders perceive the funding landscape as complex and time-consuming, with application processes that do not always lead to successful outcomes. As a result, there is a strong need for more targeted support to improve efficiency and increase the likelihood of success.

Recommendations:

Develop a tool that links available subsidies to clear eligibility criteria, enabling startups to identify the most relevant funding opportunities. This should be complemented by guidance to help startups assess which options are most suitable and make informed decisions about where to invest their time and effort.

Reflection: All Midpoint Brabant startups knew who to go to find relevant finance information.

WORK PACKAGE AREAS; OTHER

Connections

An important challenge that emerged, although not directly linked to a specific work package, is the need for stronger and more targeted connections. This insight is particularly relevant for Business Developers.

The primary issue relates to access to relevant markets and key decision-makers. Startups are actively seeking direct, high-quality contacts within their specific sectors and problem domains.

In addition to market access, startups also highlighted the importance of broader ecosystem connections. They are interested in building relationships with:

- Institutions, including investors and subject-matter experts
- Other entrepreneurs working within similar social impact themes
- Startups at different stages of development, to facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange

Notably, more than one-third of the startups indicated interest in a community platform, provided it is well-moderated and offers meaningful engagement.

Recommendations:

Startups for Society should strengthen its role as an ecosystem connector by using events to facilitate targeted, high-value connections between startups, investors, partners and key stakeholders.

CONCLUSION



This needs analysis highlights that startups are highly satisfied with the support of business developers (rated 4/5), but still face challenges in navigating, accessing, and applying the available resources.

Across all work packages, a consistent pattern emerges, startups are not primarily seeking more offerings, but rather more structured, accessible, and actionable support. Knowledge needs are highly practical and execution-focused, requiring direct applicability to immediate business challenges. Events are valued only when they are targeted, relevant, and outcome-oriented, particularly those that facilitate meaningful connections. Communication challenges come from the fact that startups do not use one central communication channel, but rather all use different ones. They rely on guidance from their business developer. Lastly, in finance, the key issue is not the availability of funding, but the ability to discover, access, and navigate funding options.

A central theme throughout the findings is the importance of connections. Startups require better access to markets, decision-makers, partners, and peers, reinforcing the role of the partners of Startups for Society as a connector and facilitator within the ecosystem.

In conclusion, this needs analysis highlights the critical role of business developers in supporting growth and impact. Their ability to guide and connect the startups with relevant information and connections to other entrepreneurs, experts and potential customers is essential. At the same time, the findings underline the importance of fostering a strong sense of community and building meaningful relationships. Together, these elements create an environment in which startups can better navigate challenges, collaborate effectively, and maximize their impact.

NEXT STEPS

From the need analysis the following concrete next steps have been identified;

Knowledge

- Focusing more on practical business subjects that were highlighted in the interviews. For example legal, marketing, storytelling and finance.
- Create shorter knowledge pieces with experts (from the above mentioned practical business subjects) such as 5 golden tips, interview with an expert etc.

Events

- Be more critical in 2026/2027, and organize a brainstorm session to define the event structure, type and theme's for fall 2026 and 2027.
 - What are we going to organize and why?
 - How do we link to existing programs?
- Organizing an expert meet-up for our startups.
- Create a Whatsapp channel to strengthen the community.

Communication

- Tell our stories from the perspective of the startups:
 - Use quotes from event attendees
 - Specific example of success stories about our partners services
- The personal email from the business developer will be a more important channel.

The work packages communication, events and knowledge need to set up a more structural way of working between the work packages as these three work packages need to work hand in hand:

- To prevent overload and to make our internal communication more efficient to our Business Developers.
- To ensure the Business Developers can communicate the correct knowledge to the right people at the right time.

Finance

- Deliver and promote the funding tool for impact startups; to find and check relevant funding opportunities.
- Expand the knowledge of the Business Developers regarding subsidies via a presentation or workshop by the subsidy expert of Midpoint Brabant.